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SUBJECT: OSCE CENTRAL ASIAN MISSION HEADS STRIVING TO
ENHANCE EFFECTIVENESS AND COOPERATION

Classified By: CDA Carol Fuller for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) In a series of meetings on January 12 and 13 with OSCE Heads of Mission from four Central Asian States (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan), all four struck similar themes on Afghanistan, radicalization, border security, and Kazakhstan's proposal for a summit. On Afghanistan, each highlighted the difficulties their host governments encountered in working with Afghans due to corruption and/or general disorganization and the need for someone to oversee and coordinate future OSCE joint training proposals. Several agreed on the need for an OSCE focal point located inside Afghanistan to handle coordination. Most agreed there are evident worrying trends towards radicalization in Central Asia, although the depth of the problem remains unknown. There was agreement, however, that a role exists for the OSCE in combating radicalization and extremism in the region. All called for increased programming on border security. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan HoMs agreed that elections were largely a sham in their countries, but saw value in having OSCE election observers there nonetheless. On a summit, all saw it as likely or certain their host countries would agree to a Summit in Astana - including Uzbekistan. End summary.

TAJIKISTAN

2. (SBU) Ambassador Ivar Vikki of Norway has been Head of Mission (HoM) in Tajikistan for four months. Following on his four years as HoM at the OSCE Center in Kazakhstan, Vikki said he was stunned by the depth of poverty in Tajikistan and the levels of violence against women. He cited a growing trend towards increased incidents of polygamy as one worrying sign towards radicalization. Vikki described his contacts with the government of Tajikistan as very good and said the GOT was supportive of the Center's work. Vikki said Tajik NGOs are active on gender, environmental and small business issues, but less so on political matters. On elections, Vikki said it was regrettable that Tajikistan took none of ODIHR's recommendations, but, in response to a question, said that he did not think it was because there had been too many. He said the upcoming election was almost a non-issue, about which he has heard very little in-country. He said the area to focus on with elections is the counting process and the media's handling of the election. However, he said he did not expect much from the election. Vikki said the areas of border management training and demining were still in need of more work. While a great deal of demining activity was being done in the south of Tajikistan, he said one of the more serious obstacles was that people working on the border were often shot at and frequently killed by Uzbek border guards. Overall, Vikki said he thought things were moving backwards in Tajikistan.

3. (SBU) On Afghanistan, Vikki said the Afghans failed to provide sufficient detail on their nominees to the Tajiks when planning joint training programs. He also said

corruption at the Tajik Embassy in Kabul, as well as excessive bureaucracy, were ongoing obstacles to Afghan's obtaining visas for joint training. He suggested having a person in Kabul to "influence" these issues and suggested the person should be from Kazakhstan (Note: Kazakhstan's Ambassador to the OSCE told us January 19 that they intend to appoint one of their Embassy officers in Kabul as an OSCE focal point for activities related to Afghanistan). Finally, he said Afghan in-fighting about who should be selected for training was also a problem.

TURKMENISTAN

14. (SBU) Ambassador Arsim Zekolli of Macedonia has been HoM in Ashgabat for eleven months. Zekolli told CDA Fuller that he was approached by the head of the Border Services in Turkmenistan on December 30 saying Turkmenistan was ready to do a year-long training program for their border officers in both the desert and the mountain regions of the country. (NOTE: Privately, Zekolli told poloff that he negotiated the right to personally select one of the three leads for this project whom he wants to be an American. "Get me someone good," he said. End note.) He said night patrolling and Mountain area border training was where the Turkmen most wanted training. On the continuing problem with students not being permitted to leave the country, Zekolli said now was the time to start increasing pressure on the GOT. Asked about radicalization, Zekolli said there is little evidence of this in Turkmenistan, however there is an increase in the number of persons attending mosques and an effort by the GOT to increase a sense of nationalistic conservatism which he described as the

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basis for radicalization. The Turkmen, he said, are not interested in anti-radicalization training because it would be an admission that they have a problem.

15. (SBU) On Afghanistan, Zekolli said there needs to be much better coordination with Kabul. "They send names like 'Mohammed from Kandahar,'" he said with exasperation. He suggested hiring someone to handle coordination and proffered the name of the current Polish Ambassador to Afghanistan as a person who would be good for the position. Zekolli said the Turkmen feel like they are wasting their time with the Afghans and fear that many just want to escape their country which is why the GOT will no longer allow training for Afghans in Ashgabat.

UZBEKISTAN

16. (SBU) Ambassador Istvan Venczel from Hungary, Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan, told CDA Fuller that the greatest problem facing his office is its status. However, he said that despite being "downgraded" to a Project Coordinator's Office in 2006, they had actually been able to increase the number of projects across all three dimensions. He said that, through the projects, the Office is still able to have real influence in Uzbekistan. He explained that the Uzbek President personally has to sign off on virtually everything, resulting in long administrative delays. Venczel said the Office is not allowed to do any monitoring or political reporting. Asked about whether he or his staff had been able to visit imprisoned journalist Dilmurod Sayyid whose wife and daughter were recently killed in a car crash, Venczel said he was not permitted to visit any prisoners despite having requested the opportunity to do so.

17. (SBU) CDA Fuller asked Venczel about the "forward movement" ODIHR Director Ambassador Lenarcic spoke about at the end of 2009. "Last year, yes, but this year, we have seen nothing positive," he replied. He expressed hope, however, that Uzbekistan might sign onto the International Convention on the Prohibition of Torture, if pressed. Venczel said it was good that ODIHR sent a small election support team to Uzbekistan in December, given the public statements by

Lenarcic that ODIHR wanted to work with the country.

18. (SBU) Adding that the Uzbeks want to control the Office more and more, he said that if the GOU tries to limit the Office even further, it would be worth having a discussion about the value of keeping the office open. He said it was not worth keeping the office simply to please the host country. On a proposed training program to counter violent extremism leading to terrorism sponsored by the OSCE's Action against Terrorism Unit (ATU), Venczel said the government would support the project if it was run under the aegis of the Project Coordinator's Office, even if the ATU is the implementer, because the government is increasingly confident in the ability of the Office to implement projects. .

19. (SBU) On Afghanistan, he said that the Uzbeks, unlike other Central Asians, do not want the OSCE working inside the country and that they simply echo Russian claims that the OSCE has no mandate to do so. Nonetheless, he said, the GOU knows that it needs the international presence in Afghanistan. Finally, despite continued Uzbek claims to oppose an OSCE Summit in Astana, he said the personal relationship between the Kazakhstani President and the Uzbek President was nowhere near as bad (note: we are unsure as to his rationale for this assertion) as between the Uzbek and Tajiks and the Uzbeks might ultimately accede to having a summit.

KYRGYZSTAN

10. (SBU) In CDA Fuller's meeting with HoM from the OSCE Center in Bishkek, Ambassador Andrew Tessoriere of the UK said the recent claims about the OSCE Academy in Bishkek being shut down by the government were overblown. The Academy won't close, he said. Nonetheless, the Academy may need to make substantive changes to its academic program to bring it more in line with standardized requirements - "none of which we meet." Tessoriere explained that Kyrgyzstan - as well as other Central Asian states - was responding to the plethora of unregulated academic institutions that popped up post independence. He said the effects of this may be felt by pS as the possible requirement that the Academy hire additional local-hire instructors and implement other measures to satisfy the government could be costly. He added that the Kazakhstanis apparently told the Kyrgyz "not to mess with" the Academy. Tessoriere said that despite some rumors in Vienna to the contrary, the Russians have no problem with Academy Director Dr. Maxim Ryabkov, a Russian national contracted by the

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Academy and not seconded or selected by the RF.

11. (SBU) On the relationship between the Kyrgyz and the Kazakhstanis, Tessoriere said it was almost as good as it gets. On the increasing dangers faced by journalists in Kyrgyzstan, Tessoriere said he received a disappointing response from the Minister of Interior who sees the incidents as equivalent to other crime in the country. He said throughout Central Asia, the security services cooperate very closely - and often at the expense of human rights.

12. (SBU) In the area of combating radicalization or radical Islam, Tessoriere said the Center needs more assistance, including a possible second US secondment who might have more background on extremism and radicalization than the current U.S. secondees working extensively and productively on police issues. The truth is, he said, we have no idea how wide or how deep radicalization is in Central Asia, but this is something the OSCE could do well.

13. (SBU) Tessoriere said he hoped to get the government to revisit the controversial law on religion and the Center was presently advising on a draft law on religious instruction. He said the government owned 555 community-based crime

prevention centers across Kyrgyzstan that were currently being under-utilized and which he wanted to see turned into 555 OSCE conflict prevention or conflict resolution centers to address a wide range of issues from radicalization to water issues, among others. He said the proposal would likely meet stiff opposition from the Ministry of Interior, however. Tessoriere said many experts on Central Asia claim the governments there are too strong to ever have a radical group take control as with the Taliban in Afghanistan. He noted he had been a student in Iran in 1976, when people said the Shah was too strong to ever lose control.

¶14. (SBU) On Afghanistan, Tessoriere said there is broad willingness to have Afghans trained in Central Asia, including Bishkek, and even some pride over the fact. He stressed, however, the need for someone to coordinate OSCE work inside Afghanistan and said he would in fact like to be that person. With an extensive background in Afghanistan and continuing close ties to President Karzai and others in the government, he could be the person best suited to do so. "I know the Taliban, and I know what they would want in a deal," he said. He said there were currently too many proposals in Central Asia for how to deal with Afghanistan - where everyone is competing to be involved, but there is no space for them to do so. The Uzbeks want the six plus three. The Tajiks say they should lead because of their common language, while the Kazakhs say they are a natural due to their role as CiO of the OSCE. He added, however, that the Bishkek Initiative held no sway with the international community and said the upcoming London Donors' Conference should be taking place in the region; and since neither Pakistan nor Iran were appropriate, he suggested somewhere in Central Asia. "As it is, it is yet another meeting at the western end of the pike." Finally, Tessoriere said the OSCE Center's Police Reform program might have applicability in Afghanistan. Although it is often difficult to get people to go to Afghanistan, the Central Asians are usually willing to do so, he said.

¶15. (C) COMMENT. Each OSCE Mission in Central Asia operates with a unique set of constraints and circumstances, but these meetings also demonstrated a degree of commonality of concerns. All the Mission heads share our goal of actively seeking out ways to better anchor Afghanistan in Central Asia through the development, wherever possible, of concrete assistance projects aimed in part at fostering enhanced regional cooperation. They agreed that an OSCE focal point inside Afghanistan is needed to facilitate coordination of OSCE project training in the region (Note: something we understand the Kazakhstanis intend to locate within their Embassy in Kabul). All the Mission heads also agreed that whatever the national differences in the region, Kazakhstan's Chairmanship of the OSCE this year will likely be a signal development in how the Central Asians view the OSCE and the role it can play in promoting and shaping substantial dialogue on relevant issues. The United States, particularly our Embassies in Central Asia, should continue to see these OSCE Field Presences as significant tools for constructing a more cooperative and constructive Central Asia.

FULLER